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ABSTRACT

The Community-Based Report provides students in business communications classes with an authentic context for thinking and writing. Students are required to investigate and produce written and oral solutions to a problem experienced by a local corporation, business, governmental or not-for-profit organization. Students develop their own cases, following six steps: (1) selecting and narrowing the topic; (2) drafting the problem statement; (3) planning and distributing the work; (4) maintaining a communications log; (5) writing the formal progress report; and (6) adapting a written report for a group oral presentation. This assignment was created as an alternative to the case method approach because the Community-Based Report more closely replicates the environment in which students will eventually work, and it also establishes important ties between the college and the community. (Sample community-based report topics, guidelines for writing a problem statement, a sample assignment, and two references are appended.) (ARH)

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THE COMMUNITY-BASED REPORT: A STRATEGY FOR TEACHING BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

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ABSTRACT

The Community-Based Report provides students in business communications classes with an authentic context for thinking and writing. Students develop their own cases: writing problem statements; finding reliable sources of information; resolving conflicting viewpoints; determining the location and accuracy of statistics; providing project timelines and progress reports as well as writing and designing professional business reports. This assignment was created as an alternative to the case method approach because (1) the Community-Based Report more closely replicates the environment in which students will eventually work and (2) it establishes important ties between the college and the community.

INTRODUCTION

The Community-Based Report assignment began with a request from the Peninsula Literacy Council for help in the creation of a promotional brochure when the Council's director, lacking both the staff and expertise to write and design the brochure, contacted the English department at Christopher Newport College. The work on the brochure became the major project of a class in business and technical writing. This collaboration between an organization experiencing a problem and students who needed to solve the problem was the genesis of the Community-Based Report. The Community-Based Report has changed and developed since the first single group project, but the impetus behind it--to provide students with as realistic a writing situation as possible--has not.

The Community-Based Report required students to investigate and produce written and oral solutions to a problem with a national perspective experienced by a local corporation, business, governmental or not-for-profit organization. This assignment was developed as an alternative to the case method approach to teaching business communication because it more closely replicates the business experience in which individuals need to (1) decide what the problem actually is, (2) obtain research which will help them solve it, (3) distribute the work based on group member expertise, and (4) produce feasible and successful conclusions and recommendations.

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The Community-Based Report contains less "artifice" [1] than the case method which often provides the student with too neatly packaged information. In an actual business situation, the investigators would have to obtain their own information: expert opinion, survey results, reliable statistics and outside studies. In part, the success or failure of the project may be contingent on how adept each individual is at information gathering. A recent report on prenatal care for indigent mothers succeeded, because the author worked as head of the x-ray department in a large hospital which cared for many indigent teenage mothers. She, therefore, had ready access to information. The Community-Based Report also requires the writer to be the manager of a large block of time (several months or one 15-week semester) when he or she must interpret this relevant information with limited professorial intervention.

Not only does the Community-Based Report more closely replicate actual professional writing conditions, but it also provides a more holistic approach to teaching a course in business communication because many of the assignments in the typical business writing course (good/bad news letters, memos, short and long reports, oral presentations, etc) are incorporated into the Community-Based Report framework. For example, students who research the problems involved in corporate sponsorship of day care may solicit information from local agencies through a survey instrument. When they receive a response, they write "good news" replies. If corporations neglect to respond, the group has to devise a tactful, yet insistent "reminder." They do not need to hypothesize about the situation or the outcome--they are involved in the "real thing." When students prepare both written and oral presentations for the Progress Report, they develop new skills, not only in writing a short report, but in communicating positive, accurate and truthful summaries of their work. As students move from one aspect of the Community-Based Report to another, they know that the problems they grapple with are actual and not fabricated.

The Community-Based Report can also provide political as well as pedagogical benefits. The State Council of Higher Education in Virginia had asked its colleges and universities to take a greater role in establishing ties with their local communities. The Community-Based Report acts as an excellent catalyst in this effort because students meet with community members, investigate and analyze local problems, and offer feasible and useful recommendations. The sense of cooperation and collaboration between students and community members provides benefits for all involved: the students, who gain important experience and make new professional contacts; the local organizations, who receive tangible advice from the students; and the college, which demonstrates its commitment to and interest in its community.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

What follows is a description of the design and implementation of a major assignment for a semester's work. The model is replicable, depending only on the variety of local issues and problems. Students of various majors can work together, each approaching the problem with the

benefit of his or her perspective and expertise.

Students are given the assignment at the beginning of the semester. They have a range of topic choices, and by the second week, they know their topic and group members. Since they have no realistic framework for time required, beginning early is mandatory. The instructor schedules meetings with a group by week three to monitor the progress of each group and individual.

Although each team's problem is different and, therefore, requires a special method of investigation, there are certain steps to the Community-Based Report which are the same. They are as follows:

- Selecting and Narrowing the Topic
- Drafting the Problem Statement
- Planning and Distributing the Work
- Writing the Progress Report
- Maintaining a Communications Log
- Writing the Formal Report
- Adapting a Written Report for a Group Oral Presentation

Selecting and Narrowing the Topic

Students receive a list of important community topics [appendix A] and must select one and limit it. For instance, one topic may be "improving the public image of a company, agency, school, organization." All the students who choose this general topic meet as a "team" before the end of week three to discuss limiting the topic. This is the first experience the students will have in negotiating and building consensus in a group. A more detailed selection account of team members is discussed under project assessment summation.

The selection and definition of the topic is a particularly crucial step. Successful groups can arrive at consensus quickly because (1) a leader emerges who directs the discussion and outcome or (2) all members are adept at compromise. Problems arise, however, if no group leader emerges or when too many leaders struggle for power. Occasionally groups take weeks to resolve the topic; in one instance, members researched different topics for several weeks before arriving at agreement. Although this struggle can slow the project's progress, it closely approximates work experience. Students need to understand that often in difficult work situations, the "problem" is not clear to everyone in the same way.

The instructor can aid the group by providing information about interpersonal relations, "transactional analysis" and good conferencing skills. It is far too easy for an instructor to intervene at this point and "decide" on a narrowed, focused topic for a contentious or divided group. In general, instructors should avoid intrusive intervention; negotiation is crucial to the establishment of the group's "corporate culture" or the way that it will handle the project. If the instructor becomes the "boss" at this stage, he or she will have to continue throughout. The cohesive, productive group needs to establish itself without minimum directives from the instructor.

Drafting the Problem Statement

Students are provided with guidelines for drafting a problem statement [appendix B]. For students with little work experience, this may be an unfamiliar responsibility. They are told that writing the problem statement will help them decide what information they need and what questions they must ask to obtain that information.

The process of drafting the problem statement is three-fold:

(1) Defining the boundaries and scope of the report;
(2) Asking the right questions;
(3) Writing a declarative statement which takes into account the nature, scope, and purpose of the report.

(1) Defining boundaries

Students select one particular aspect of a problem, limit the time period and type or organization. Students need to narrow the scope carefully. The more specific the topic delineation, the easier time they will have in selecting specific community organizations to investigate. One particularly successful group limited its topic to "successful small business" and then further to "women-owned businesses within the past 5-10 years." Students researched existing businesses and found a number which were traditional (clothing, crafts, retail) and nontraditional (chimney sweep, import/export). Less successful groups often fail to limit sufficiently. A group which was interested in the problems of establishing a community half-way house in a suburban neighborhood could not decide on whether to limit the scope of its research to drug addiction or alcoholism. Since the direction of both field and library research would be guided by this choice, team members spent unnecessary time researching information they would be unable to use in the final report.

(2) Asking the right questions

After setting the boundaries, the group is then ready to go to the next step in problem definition--asking the right questions. Unlike "given" cases, this assignment provides no "facts"; therefore, the students must diagnose the situation and generate their own "need to know" questions about the issues involved, the trouble experienced, the origin of a particular problem, and whether any viable solutions have been attempted in the past. Students should be encouraged to begin with hypotheses. For instance, a group which wanted to improve the image of a shopping mall and to increase patronage hypothesized that the main problem was the shabby nature of the building and the constant traffic congestion. After asking many questions and receiving surprising answers, the group members saw the problem as one of location. This provided an entirely different focus for investigation and an entirely new set of "need to know" questions.

It is important for the group members to see the problem and its definition as fluid and changeable; as team members research the problem in the community and seek answers to their questions in national research

literature, they can and should revise their problem statement and completely redraft if necessary. They need to see the dynamic nature of problem solving: diagnosis/hypothesis/revision. There is no one answer or way of solving the problem.

At this point, the instructor may wish to discuss some problem-solving techniques, differentiating between primary and secondary causes of problems. Teaching students to look beyond the obvious cause (which may actually be a symptom or manifestation of a problem) is crucial at this stage of the project. Rather than simply describing and defining a problem, students need at this stage to learn to analyze the problem, for example, by looking at a number of cause and effect relationships or by comparing the unique characteristics of a local problem with the larger context of the problem found in professional literature.

(3) Formulating the problem statement

After a period of group discussion by about week four, teams are asked to submit a draft of the problem statement to the instructor. Instructors may give students a model format to use: "The purpose of this report is to analyze _____ and to provide both conclusions and recommendations which will solve _____."

It is particularly important to have a statement which calls for both the analysis of a problem and the drafting of conclusions and recommendations. Students are too rarely asked to offer recommendations for improvement; they are usually judged by their ability to analyze all the aspects of a given situation or text. A well-conceived problem statement stimulates students to think about practical, feasible, and clearly defined suggestions for future action which they will need to make in the report.

Planning and Distributing the Work

The Community-Based Report is a team effort, but students are graded on their individual written and oral projects. Therefore, the group must analyze the scope of the problem in its entirety and then make specific work assignments. The group members should take into account each member's strengths and interests; once again, the Community-Based Report replicates the business situation in which projects must be completed by members in a particular organization.

The "need to know" questions that have been generated in the problem-solving stage can be categorized into different areas of expertise: Students with an interest in mathematical statistics or law may want to look into this aspect of a problem. Students in the humanities may want to gauge worker or public opinion on the problem or to analyze the ethical issues involved. However, students may wish to choose a perspective different from their discipline.

Once again, students need to use their negotiating skills in dividing the work equitably and with regard to individual preferences and abilities. Instructors should intervene only if the group reaches an impasse.

The Time Line

After a short period of individual research, teams meet in week five or six to devise a time-line of deadlines for all phases of the report. Some deadlines are imposed by the instructor (due date for progress report, written report, and oral presentations). However, all other dates are agreed upon by group members. Again, self-determined task completion is especially crucial for the student whose idea of a deadline is completing the work the night before. In fact, the setting of deadlines is consistently mentioned by students as a determinant of success or failure in the project. One student procrastinated in sending out surveys and did not receive a significant number in return before the project was due. Another student took field pictures of a shopping mall but could not get them reproduced into slides in time for the oral presentation. As in a work-world business situation, there are no extensions and "incompletes"; students need to know that failure to complete work on time results in lost contracts, inadequate preparations, poor public relations.

Writing the Progress Report

By week 8 or 9, students should be asked to write and orally present a "progress report." This assignment has a number of goals. It provides the students with an experience in writing and presenting a short, informative report; it also gives students an opportunity to test some tentative solutions to specific problems on a real audience. When this exercise works well, the student presenting the progress report receives important feedback from the student audience which may lead to additional inquiry and investigation. Since some students may have little experience in the drafting and formatting of a short report, the instructor may suggest a structure for the progress report. The progress report also allows team members to monitor each other. It becomes quite obvious to everyone involved when a particular student is falling behind.

During the drafting state, students are encouraged to read and to edit each other's work. It is possible to do this informally or to make an assignment like "Helping Out a Colleague" [appendix C]. Editing and revising skills need to be stressed, particularly for students unfamiliar with the "process" approach to writing. One good exercise is for students to edit and make tactful suggestions on another person's report. Specific editing techniques, like Lanham's Revising Business Prose, encourage students to write more active, concise sentences and paragraphs. Instructors may also provide guidelines for making constructive criticism which goes beyond "I like it; it's good" or "I don't understand." There are excellent chapters on positive criticism of writing in Erika Lindemann's A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers and in Donald Hall's A Writer Teaches Writing. Although students are doing individual reports, this is also a good time to remind them that in business they will often write parts of a report which will be "blended" together

as a joint effort.*

Keeping a Communications Log

The Communications Log serves as an important control for both the instructor and other team members. Each student briefly summarizes the results of interviews, surveys, correspondence and library research in the log. Students can share logs at team meetings. The instructor may also collect, review and monitor the progress of each student throughout the term. Students are encouraged to describe both their failures and successes; thus the log provides the instructor and the student with important information on the effectiveness of a particular topic, assignment, or approach.

Thus far, student logs have provided important insights into why certain students make successful researchers and others do not. Students who are accustomed to communicating almost exclusively by telephone find that this approach is often frustrating and ineffective in a business situation. They cannot get to important people by dialing a Director of Public Relations' phone number. After logging several unsuccessful "phone attempts," the perceptive student will analyze his or her actions and attempt an introductory letter or different approach.

Instructors may wish to summarize the findings of one set of student logs and to pass on the suggestions to the following semester's class. In this way, both student and instructor can take advantage of the Communication Log's value as a pedagogical tool in the teaching of business writing.

Writing the Formal Report

After an experience with the short, informal report, students are usually ready to tackle the longer formal report. A selection of final report topics submitted during the past are listed in appendix A. For many students, this is their first experience, and thus instructors may wish to devote several lectures to formatting, visual aids and documentation of business reports. Michael Keene's Effective Professional Writing is one good reference work. Instructors may encourage or require students to share drafts of their reports with the class or instructor; if instructors do not wish to see a draft of the entire report, they may ask students to submit a draft of the executive summary in advance of the report deadline.

The executive summary

This assignment serves several purposes: (1) Students learn how to write an executive summary which is not usually a component of many college assignments; (2) Students summarize their reports in one page and

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*Two important articles on the subject are John S. Fielden's "What Do You Mean You Don't Like My Style?" Harvard Business Review, May/June, 1982, and "What Do You Mean I Can't Write?" Harvard Business Review, May/June, 1964.

thus test the logic and order of their ideas; (3) The executive summary is an excellent pedagogical tool in the classroom because it is short enough to duplicate and to discuss in class. During a workshop on this topic, students' questions about a particular summary can stimulate its author to see his or her report from an audience's point of view and make adjustments in either form or content before the final submission of the report.

Format for the formal report

Students accustomed to writing academic "essays" have little or no experience with business formatting techniques: headlines, underlining, bullets, and other visual aids which are a part of professional reports. Instructors may, therefore, provide an adjustable "format" that students can adapt for their own reports. Lectures and guidelines for constructing the various parts of a written report are also helpful: letter of transmittal, table of contents, executive summary, sections of the actual report, endnotes, bibliography, and appendix.

It is necessary to stress the importance of the Conclusion/Recommendation section of the formal report. The best reports provide clear, feasible conclusions and recommendations based on well-documented research: literature searches, interviews, survey analysis. In order to ensure that students propose recommendations for future actions (a step which is beyond the scope of most academic essays), class time is allocated for the discussion of conclusions and recommendations. Again, this assignment functions as a control; problems can usually be detected at this late--but not irretrievably late--stage.

Adapting the Written Report for Group Oral Presentation

The last major assignment for the Community-Based Report is the adaptation of written material for oral presentation. At this point in the term, several class meetings should be scheduled to allow team members to begin the process of synthesizing written reports into one coherent and concise oral presentation. Instructors may wish to lecture on the differences between oral and written presentation because students may not realize that a distinction exists. Perhaps a guest lecturer from an area business can be brought in to talk about oral presentations. Architectural firms might be a particularly good source.

Since students are generally anxious about the oral presentation, several practice (ungraded) speeches, such as an oral presentation of the progress report and a short (5 minutes) speech on a personal topic, are recommended.

Many younger students have never given a speech, and a few have never even spoken in a classroom situation. For this reason, instructors should discuss the format of an oral presentation: the need for a cordial introduction, preview of main points, carefully constructed transitions and summations of major points and conclusions. Instructors may also suggest preparations for the day of the speech and ask that students make notes on 4 x 6 cards, but do not take a completely written speech to the podium. They must present but not read their reports.

The instructor evaluates the oral presentation and provides written comments to each student. An excellent format for the analysis of a student speech can be found in Judi Brownell's "Presentational Skills Critique," published in the Bulletin (June 1986). At the end of each group presentation (usually one 50-minute class period), there is a five-minute question-and-answer period and then another five-minute self-evaluation by team members. When students are truthful about their experiences as both presenter and audience, this proves to be a genuinely collaborative learning experience. Instructors, however, should encourage students to ask the presenters "hard" questions, in order to simulate a press conference environment. Students may also wish to invite community people to the presentation. In fact, the presence of outside evaluation can improve the quality of the oral presentation as documented by the well-known Alverno Assessment model.*

Final Community-Based Reports are due on the first day of oral presentations. All evaluations of oral presentations are returned at the last class.

PROJECT ASSESSMENT AND SUMMATION

The three major factors which determine success or failure in this project are these:

- Student ability and motivation
- Group unity and commitment
- Topic suitability.

Student Ability and Motivation

In creating teams for the Community-Based Report, instructors can create groups based entirely on students' topic preference. However, in formulating teams, instructors may wish to consider other factors, specifically student age, work experience and major, as well as topic preference. Older students who have worked previously are usually more goal-oriented than younger students and can plan and execute a series of actions more easily. By balancing older and younger students, an "apprenticeship" relationship can develop in teams without the artificial intervention of the instructor.

A balance of technical/professional and liberal arts students is also desirable. Students should be encouraged to divide the project by analyzing the specific strengths, skills, and interests of their team members. One particularly successful team working on instituting a child care policy for a local corporation included a science teacher, several liberal arts students, and a business major. The science teacher did a statistical analysis of child care policies and laws, while the liberal

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*A good model for evaluation can be found in the Assessment at Alverno College by the Alverno College Faculty. Milwaukee: Alverno College, 1979.

arts students worked on the philosophical issues involved in child care. The group's varied ages and experiences enabled the mentor system to work extremely well. One student in the group had transferred from a community college and had never held a job or written a research report; she received suggestions and even research leads from the more experienced members of her team. It was this crucial sharing which enabled her to succeed.

This balancing of skills also approximates the work place in which individuals with different levels of expertise and experience join together to solve a problem. Students need to see how the apprentice relationship works--how individuals "network" to aid each other without the guidance of the boss or instructor. In the given "packaged" models where students work alone on individual problems, this work-world environment is far more difficult to replicate.

Group Unity and Commitment

One of the most productive lessons learned in the Community-Based Report process can come out of the most destructive--group conflict. One student who had a particularly difficult time with another individual in the group said, at the end of the project, that the most important lesson she learned was how to get along with people. For students whose academic experience consists solely of formulating an independent thesis, writing an original paper and pleasing one individual--the instructor--the group interaction can seem frustrating, time-consuming, and complicated. However, the initial confrontation and tension which arise during the creation of the problem statement and distribution of work can provide the energy and group unity for the project. In most cases, instructors should watch these interactions in class but should not intervene unless specifically asked to mediate. RESIST THE URGE TO SETTLE THE PROBLEM. The initial conflict usually gives way to a truce between aggressive and passive team members who find their own path to consensus.

There are instances, however, in which instructor intervention is required. One weak project was nearly sabotaged by a student who attended class periodically and then disappeared until the final oral presentation. The two students who worked consistently on the project had planned for contingencies and learned to take control of the project for themselves, negating the uncooperative student's influence. Although the other group members tried to contact the person at home and to arrange out-of-class team meetings, the student remained uncooperative. For this reason, a written student attendance policy is recommended. The team meetings both in and out of class are an essential factor in the Community-Based Report's success; students who come unprepared or not at all can damage both the project's morale and effectiveness.

Topic Availability

Of the three factors which determine success or failure in the Community-Based Report, the topic selection seems the least important. Able, motivated, well-balanced teams can take even an unpromising topic and produce an informative and interesting professional report.

One successful team decided to analyze the declining reputation of an inner-city hospital and to make suggestions for improving its embattled image. Despite a new facility, this hospital and its image had deteriorated for years, and thus, rehabilitating them was going to be quite difficult. The students who worked on the project interviewed not only the medical personnel but also the current public relations director who provided a vast archives of information. Students interviewed the hospital director and members of the community, and on the basis of their in-depth research, created a dynamic and exciting advertising/marketing campaign for the beleaguered hospital. When the project was completed, the team submitted copies of the report to the hospital and its director, who is also the mayor of the city and is on the Board of Visitors for the college.

SUMMATION

The Community-Based Report allows students to replicate a realistic business experience without the "artifice" of the case method approach discussed by Marilyn Butler in her article, "A Reassessment of the Case Approach: Reinforcing Artifice in Business Writing Courses [1]. The Community-Based Report encourages students to see that it is far more difficult to "solve" problems when real people with real egos and emotions are involved. As Professor Butler notes in her critique of prepackaged cases: "Students can be quite adept at solving class writing problems but . . . are invariably surprised by what actually happens [in real life] . . . by the expectations, conventions, personalities, restraints, and contradictions they encounter, even though they think they are prepared when they go out [2, p. 7].

The Community-Based Report, therefore, has many distinct advantages over the case method. The report allows students to see a local problem, identify its primary causes, view the situation in a national perspective, and join with others to solve it. They learn the value of community involvement, and some can look at their contributions with pride. This assignment, however, is no panacea; instructors who use it in their business communications classes will want to refine and revise the format and process to suit their own needs. Problems in creating more equitable, evenly matched groups and supervising students without imposing artificial controls still need to be worked out. However, at present, the Community-Based Report provides for our students the bridge they need to the actual work experience.

REFERENCES

[1] Butler, Marilyn, "A Reassessment of the Case Approach: Reinforcing Artifice in Business Writing Courses," The Bulletin of the Association for Business Communication, Vol. 48, No. 3, (Sept. 1985), pp. 4-7.

[2] Bowan, Joel P., "Replies to Marilyn S. Butler's Article, 'A Reassessment of the Case Approach: Reinforcing Artifice in Business Writing Courses,'" The Bulletin of the Association for Business Communication, Vo. 49, No. 2 (June, 1985), pp. 1-7.

APPENDIX A

Sample: Community-Based Report Topics

During this term, each student will be asked to do a written report and an oral presentation based on the report. In order to complete this assignment, students will work in a group to analyze a specific problem and will implement a plan for further action. Students will then work on their own individual reports, with the instructor acting as the supervisor of each "company project." Throughout the course of the project, students on the same team will confer with each other in class in order to assess progress or new developments which might alter the group's original plan.

Listed below are a number of community-based problems which require solutions. Those students who select the same problem will become a team. After team members meet to discuss the case, they will write a problem statement, plan the research process, and provide each team member with a specific assignment for his or her written report.

Each student will submit a report of 8-10 pages in length which analyzes the data and other pertinent information for which he or she is responsible. As a team member, you may be asked to do primary research, or you may be asked to synthesize the current thinking on a particular problem as viewed in business periodicals. Or, you may be asked to do a combination of both, depending upon the nature of your case.

In addition, each student will participate as a team member in an oral presentation to the entire class. Your oral presentation need not be a complete summary of your written report; it is the responsibility of the team to organize the presentation so that the audience can best understand the results and recommendations of the study.

Possible Topics for English 353 Community-Based Reports

Choose any four (in order of preference) according to your training, interest, and experience:

1. Instituting "flex-time" or "job sharing" or "homework" at a particular corporation or organization.
2. Instituting a drug and/or alcohol screening program for employees.
3. Improving the public image of X company, agency, school, police department, college, hospital, etc.
4. Investigate successes and failures in small businesses in Hampton Roads.
5. Research the problems involved in starting a shelter for abused women, a sheltered workshop for mentally retarded individuals, a half-way house for former drug addicts, etc. Investigate successes and failures.
6. Creation of an anti-smoking, anti-nuclear campaign in the

area and nation.

7. Studying causes and consequences of current liability insurance issues: crisis in malpractice insurance for doctors, or new insurance cancellations for high risk men (AIDS).

8. Investigate the problems in advertising college arts, athletic events, both within the college and outside community. Suggest improvements for communicating.

9. Instituting a new smoking policy for the X corporation, agency, school (your choice).

10. Study the renovation and rebuilding of any downtown area--students could compare and contrast projects which have worked and those which have not. How has communication affected the outcome of the project?

Model for Case Development on Community-Based Report

Formulating a new smoking policy at the _____ Corporation.

Investigate the smoking policies at a few organizations on the Peninsula in order to determine their attitudes about smoking in the workplace. If possible, you should interview employees at a few sites to determine if a particular policy is, in fact, followed. You will also need to do a survey of the current business literature to assess alternative national smoking policies which are not represented in Virginia.

Your role: You are in an employee for a firm which would like to implement a smoking policy. Your boss has asked you and a group of other employees in Personnel to study the problem and make recommendations for a plan to be implemented in 1987. From the information you collect, you will prepare an analytical report with specific recommendations applicable to your organization. You will formulate a problem statement with your group, and then the group will assign you one aspect of the situation to analyze. You will collect and analyze your data (both primary and/or secondary) and make recommendations. For the oral presentation, you will discuss your analysis and recommendations with other group members and incorporate them into the group presentation.

Selected Topics

1. Combatting child abuse: the role of child protective services in Virginia.
2. Older students going to college: barriers, catalysts, and a model.
3. Improving the image of Christopher Newport College to mature students: a distributed alternative.
4. Flextime in the city government.
5. Success of three selected local small businesses.
6. Health care professionals' attitudes towards the elderly.
7. The success and failure of small manufacturing businesses on the Peninsula.
8. Implementing flextime in retail organizations.
9. Alternatives to traditional methods of institutional care for the elderly.
10. Prenatal care for the indigent in one local hospital.

11. Military vs. civilian child abuse agencies: a comparative analysis.
12. The success and failure of women-owned businesses.
13. Improving the image of Newport News Hospital.
14. Establishing a day-care facility for employees of a bank.
15. Developing a smoking policy for a local hospital.
16. Upgrading the image of a Newmarket shopping mall.
17. Establishing a half-way house for former drug addicts.
18. Creating a workable insurance program for state and local governments in Virginia.

APPENDIX B

Guidelines for Writing a Problem Statement

Writing the problem statement helps you to decide what information you need to obtain in order to complete the report.

Step One:

Define the boundaries and scope of your report:

1. What aspect of the problem will you research?
2. What time period will you cover?
3. What kind(s) of business(es)/corporation(s) will you study?
4. Will you study the causes and/or effects of the problem?
5. What kinds of recommendations are feasible in order to solve the problem?

Step Two:

Ask the right questions:

1. What do you need to know about this problem?
2. Why is the issue important?
3. Who is involved in the situation?
4. Where is the trouble located?
5. When and how did the problem begin?
6. Who (if anyone) has tried to solve it in the past? Why was the solution not entirely successful?

Step Three:

Develop the statement of purpose: Write a declarative statement of purpose which takes into account the nature and scope of the project as defined in steps one and two.

Your statement may begin: "This report will analyze _____ and provide both conclusions and recommendations to solve _____."

APPENDIX C

Helping Out a Colleague - Assignment

A group member has asked you to review his (her) draft before the final submission to your supervisor. Since you and this person are equals in the organization, you do not have any reservations about expressing your honest (and tactful) opinion of the draft.

You should analyze the "draft" for:

1. its impact on its intended audience;
2. its purpose (what it wishes to say);
3. its organization (how it says it);
4. its style (word choice, sentence structure, paragraphing, grammar, spelling).

As you already know, most people are pretty sensitive about their writing. Therefore, when you say something negative, it helps to suggest a positive way of revising.

Your reply in memo form:

After you have finished analyzing the communication, write a memo to your colleague discussing possible problems and offering solutions. You may want to discuss all the four points mentioned above, or you may concentrate on one or two particularly obvious problems. The decision is yours.